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ABSTRACT

The mission, organization, rationale, roles, and functions of the department are discussed. The status of the department and its interface with other departments are also described. The paper deals with problems of funding, credibility, relations between research and evaluation versus planning and development, and problems of relating research and development to other departments of the school system. (Author/MLF)

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ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS*

By: Dr. James N. Jacobs, Dr. Gerald L. Varland

ORGANIZATION

The Department of Research and Development is one of four departments headed by Assistant Superintendents constituting the basic organization of the Cincinnati Public Schools (see Organization Chart). The Department consists of five branches whose common linkage is that of delineating, obtaining and providing relevant information to staff and other personnel to help them improve the quality of educational decision making. While each branch has this common thrust, each deals with different types of information and/or with different emphasis.

The Department of Research and Development was constituted in 1972 as an amalgamation of three branches: Program Research and Design; Testing Services (these two branches were reporting to a Department Head in charge of Instruction); and Administrative Research (which reported directly to the Superintendent). This new organization came in with a new Superintendent.

Branch Descriptions

The Administrative Research Branch was organized in the early 1900's to provide the Superintendent, the Board of Education and the State Department of Education with bread-and-butter educational statistics. It still has that function. It collects and provides data on: school attendance zones, actual and projected membership, salary schedules, class size, State funding of schools, school building

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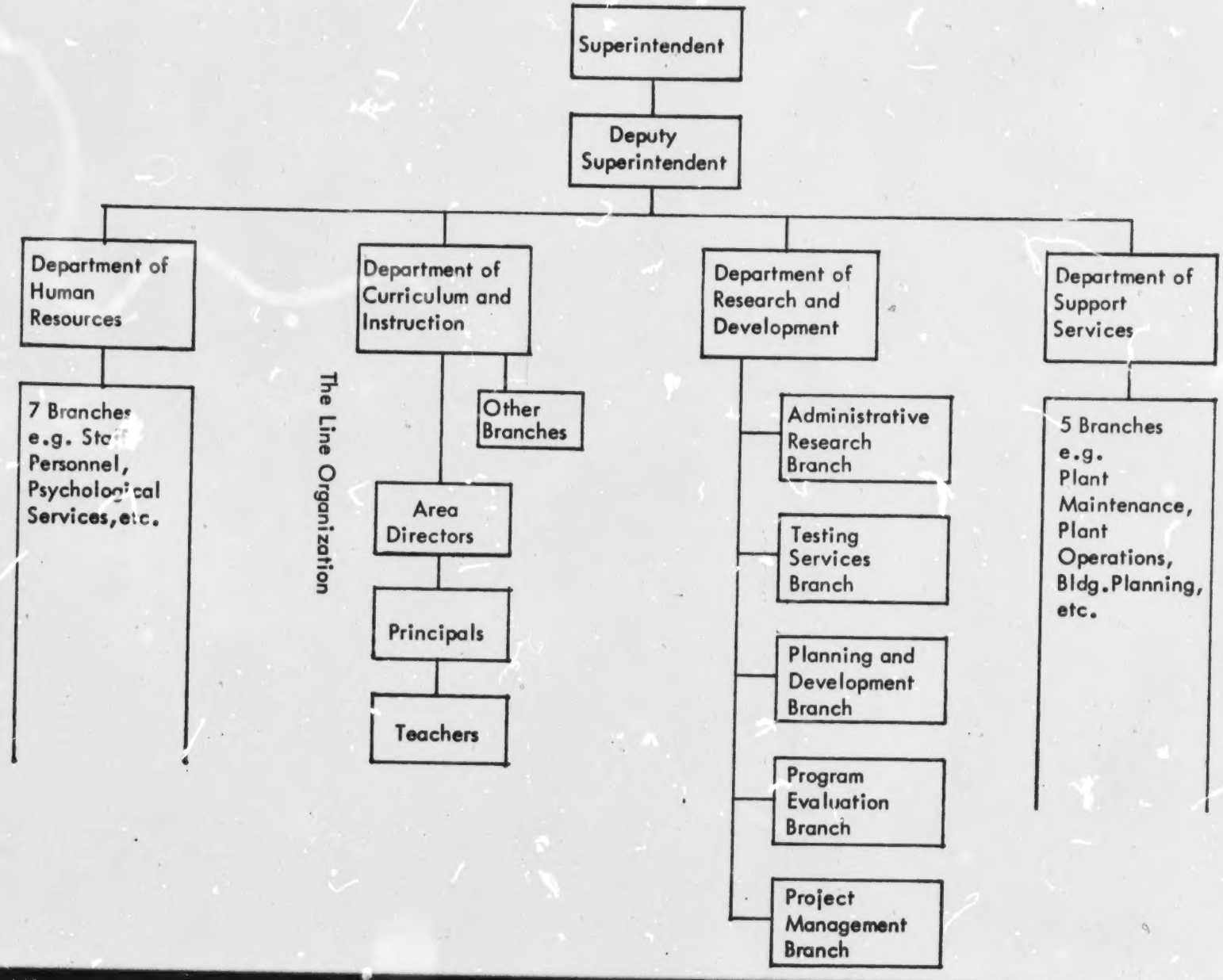
An Abbreviated Organization Chart of the Cincinnati Public Schools



utilization, per-pupil costs, determination of school levies needed, analysis of votes on levies, to mention only a few.

The Administrative Research Branch has two other broad functions that distinguish it from the remaining branches. First, it is the branch which has stewardship for Board of Education policies. In this regard this branch identifies areas of policies for which none have been written and calls them to the attention of the Board of Education. It also collects and classifies present Board policies into a coherent scheme which makes it readily useable by members of the Board of Education. The second function is that of developing and maintaining a school unit information system. The latter is an elaborate data base providing several hundred descriptor variables for each school in the school system that assists administrators, planners and developers in decision-making. The information system produces eleven separate school reports to principals each year. Included among these are: exceptional characteristics report, achievement expectancy report, basic data report, form survey reports (teacher, student, parent and administrator) trend reports, etc.

The Testing Services Branch has the mission of planning and implementing the program of standardized testing for the school system. This year for the first time the testing program will consist of continuous grade testing from grade one through grade eight in the basic skills of reading and arithmetic. In addition, this branch administers scholastic aptitude tests in grades three, six and eight. Within the next three years, the Testing Services Branch will be responsible for administering a criterion-referenced

inventory both in reading and arithmetic which is now being developed in the Planning Development Branch. In addition to the responsibility for standardized testing, the branch also provides training and consulting services for the teaching staff on matters pertaining to test interpretation, and selection and use of tests. It also provides testing services for special programs such as the G.E.D. and selection tests for Special College Preparatory Programs operated by the school system.

The mission of the Planning and Development Branch is to identity priority educational needs of the school system and to plan programs to meet these needs. In accomplishing this mission, the branch is deeply involved in needs assessment and goal development at both school system and local school levels. This branch utilizes information from other branches from Research and Development which reveal educational needs and helps order them into priority goals. Programs are then evaluated or developed which bear on these priority goals. If promising program strategies are not available to meet these goals, they are designed by members of this branch and usually submitted as proposals to various funding agencies. Perhaps as much as thirty to forty percent of the time of this branch is spent on proposal development. In this process extensive work is done with community groups and staff to insure responsiveness of the proposal to the identified need. This branch also obtains information on all types of resources, grants or otherwise, that can be used for program development. In many cases, technical assistance is given to non-members of the Research and Development staff in developing proposals.

This branch constructs student, teacher, parent and administrator surveys each year to identify problems and assess the needs of the school system. Over the past couple of years, the Planning and Development Branch has gotten deeply into computer applications in education and has acquired a rather substantial, well-trained staff. Since we consider computer applications to education as being a continuous process, it is likely that this unit will remain in the Planning and Development Branch and not be mainstreamed per se.

Program Evaluation Branch. Using terminology from the CIPP evaluation model, the three previous branches may be thought of as contributing to context evaluation, with the Planning and Development Branch emphasizing input evaluation. In contrast, the Program Evaluation Branch emphasizes process and product evaluation. Four types of evaluation roles are defined: project evaluation, independent program evaluation, external evaluation and local school evaluation. The project evaluator is assigned exclusively to a specific project and reports to the project director. The job is primarily formative (internal) evaluation, and is conducted during the first year or two of the project's development. As the project matures and finished products or specific outcomes are produced, we phase out the project evaluator and phase in an independent program evaluator. We call this role independent because the evaluator reports not to the project director but rather to the coordinator of the Program Evaluation Branch. The independent program evaluator focuses attention on outcomes and overall impact (goal-free) and makes recommendations

on recycling decisions. The third role of external evaluator also focuses mainly on summative evaluation but for projects operated outside of Research and Development, particularly Title I and other State-funded projects. These evaluations are strictly goal-based.

To our knowledge, Cincinnati has developed and pioneered a unique evaluation concept which we call Local School Evaluation (LSE). In contrast to other types of evaluators, LSE's are thought of as adjunct members of local school staffs. Their most distinguishing characteristic is their responsiveness to felt needs identified by the principal or school staff. Their activities range from identifying needs to measuring outcomes. They might be called upon to perform survey research, a literature review on learning styles, an item analysis on a test, or a project evaluation. A major goal is to draw local school staff into a way of thinking about improvement of education (the R and D way?).

Under certain circumstances we have also hired external auditors when credibility may be a sensitive issue. The auditor is expected to bring three major qualities to the project operation: objectivity, expertise, and perspective. The auditor, through a planned series of activities, determines the appropriateness of evaluation in design and operation. The auditor verifies the results of the evaluation process, and adds an additional measure of credibility. A project auditor is used only in projects where the funding agency supports the service. The auditor reports his findings directly to the funding source after consultation with project staff.

A paper presented by Bresnan, Varland and Gastright[1] goes into much more detail on types of evaluation roles and their respective strengths and weaknesses. It should be pointed out that the Program Evaluation Branch staff may not be exclusively assigned one of the four aforementioned roles. A given person may be assigned 50% project evaluator and 50% external evaluator. Assignments change from year to year and even month to month, depending on current conditions. Further, one of these roles may not be actually fulfilled at a given time.

Finally the Program Evaluation Branch administers a Professional Library for the total school system and is largely responsible for R and D publications.

Project Management Branch. Whereas the Planning and Development Branch develops project proposals, and whereas the Program Evaluation Branch conducts the evaluation of the projects, the Project Management Branch is responsible for project implementation. This branch phases-in new projects, assists in hiring and training staff, serves as liaison between the project proposal planners and the project staff, supervises project directors, manages the budget and, upon termination of the grant, phases the project out of Research and Development and assists in its institutionalization in the mainstream of the school system. This branch plays a trouble-shooter role in the host school(s) where the project is being implemented. It also phases-in involvement of line organization personnel so as to obtain their assistance, support, and commitment which is essential to the final goal of program institutionalization.

(1) Bresnan, Varland, Gastright. Spectrum of Objectivity-Credibility in Evaluation. Paper presented at A.E.R.A., April 1975.

Intra-Departmental Coordination

Because of the high degree of inter-face required among Research and Development branches, weekly meetings of the R and D Council are held. The Council is composed of the five R and D branch coordinators plus one elementary and one secondary principal representative from their respective organizations. The principals keep us "reality based" and form a communication linkage with school administrators. Other personnel participate in Council meetings on invitation, depending on agenda topics. The Council is chaired by the Department Head.

The Council serves:

1. To identify goals and establish priorities for the Department and to facilitate their achievement
2. To provide developmental and operational guidelines for Department activities
3. To hear and evaluate progress reports from various projects or activities within branches
4. To assign work to the various branches in response to the needs and/or requests of the Department
5. To provide and to disseminate information within and outside the Department
6. To coordinate activities of the R and D Department with other units of the school system
7. To uncover and try to resolve problems that impede departmental goal attainment
8. To coordinate the activities with the R and D Department.

Inter-Departmental Coordination and Inter-Face

This function is handled through the Cabinet which is headed by the Deputy Superintendent and is composed of the four Department

Heads. The Cabinet functions for the four departments as R and D Council does for the branches within Research and Development. While most of the information flowing from Research and Development is utilized by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (C & I), a substantial portion is also directed to the Departments of Human Resources and Support Services. Needs assessment services by Research and Development are probably more prominent than any others for the two latter departments.

Inter-face activities between Research and Development and Curriculum and Instruction are common and sometimes sensitive in nature. Sensitivity arises from the fact that Research and Development constructs programs and curricula which are often in competition with ongoing programs of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. The ultimate goal of R and D projects, of course, is to mainstream those projects which have merit and to meet goals which were either previously unmet or met better than the existing programs. Over the years we have learned that the transition from experimental programs to mainstream programs occurs best when members of the line organization (usually Instructional Consultants) are involved in all phases of the development process -- from planning to implementation and evaluation. Such involvement creates a feeling of ownership and commitment, such that upon termination of the project, the transition occurs rather smoothly. Often, in fact, a project staff from Research and Development will move right along with the project as it becomes institutionalized into the hard money line organization. We see this as an ideal situation.

The other most common linkage with Curriculum and Instruction is the fact that they are the decision-makers or the clientele to whom most evaluation reports are targeted. Our evaluation personnel generally enjoy an atmosphere of respect and credibility. When an evaluation finding indicates bad news, it is discussed with the administrator on a face-to-face basis. Our recommendations are frequently followed although as you can imagine, many must be overlooked for a variety of reasons.

ADMINISTRATION

Personnel

At the time of writing, the Research and Development Department has thirty-five full-time professional staff members. This number varies greatly from year to year, depending on the number of project grant awards. All but a few members of the staff have a Masters Degree, and about one-third of them have Doctorates. Most of them have backgrounds in development and evaluation work, with the exception of our project directors who we often hire because of their specialized knowledge in a certain area. For example, the staff of a preschool project, including the project director, are specialists in that area.

Keeping staff members in full-time employment poses a special problem. When personnel are hired, they are made aware of the fact that their tenure in Research and Development is very likely limited to the grant period. Yet, the strength of the Department lies in its personnel, and it is very difficult to release a person when it is known that he/she has excellent qualifications for R and D work.

Furthermore, the distinctions we make among specialists are not understood or appreciated by field practicioners.

Management By Objectives

Each year the Department sets forth a set of goals based on function, need and anticipated resources. This year we are operating under an eighteen goal structure. The Research and Development Council works through a process of goal reduction until a set of activities or objectives is identified which can then be assigned to every member of the staff. The Department Head sets forth the major goal areas and these are reduced to subgoals by branch coordinators. They in turn reduce the subgoals into objectives and activities with respect to their branch staff. This whole process is one of negotiation and our experience to date has been that we list much more work to be done than we can practically do. We are gaining a better appreciation, however, of what is and what is not realistic. The process, which ends in the identification of work tasks, can be very laborious, but it is probably worth the effort. It sets the basic mold for Department coordination and expectation. While target dates are normally set for the completion of the objectives, we have not gone very far in devising schemes for rating the quality of the work completed. We do know, however, whether or not the job was done.

In addition to the work that was planned to be done, it is obvious that much work is identified during the course of the year that was never anticipated. The system of assigning unanticipated work generally consists of identification and assignment of work within R and D Council. These assignments are recorded on "Work

Assignment" forms and summarized by the Department Head at the end of each year.

Co-Mingling of Resources

Virtually all projects require specialized resources such as media services, photography, editing, etc., which are often difficult to obtain within the resources of a particular project. When we plan projects, however, we make each contribute a certain amount to the operation of these specialized services. We have, for example, an elaborate media center operated by a top-flight specialist who gives services to many projects and, of course, each project contributes to its operation. The center provides photographic service, graphics, layout and design work, audio-video tapes, etc. They are capable of producing a project brochure, set up a standardized test or publish an annual report.

Similarly, we have a computer applications center which is funded by many projects, and which now is capable of producing statistical analyses, project budget control, scoring surveys and producing all kinds of management reports, to name a few.

These services require a critical mass of our Department resources for their continued operation.

Coordination of R and D Activities Outside the Department

Like all large cities, we are besieged with university students requesting permission to conduct research in our schools. For the most part, field personnel resent intrusion by students whose labors find no practical application by school people. In defense,

we have developed a policy on research by outside persons or agencies which in effect requires that the schools are to benefit in some meaningful way before permission is granted to conduct the study.

We have, however, acquired an offensive posture rather than a defensive one. We now see masters and doctoral students and university staffs as a positive force and adjunct staff in the conduct of research and development activities in the school system. We have a simple ground rule -- we must identify the problem and set the conditions under which the research and development will take place. The trick, then, is to match the needs with the interests of students or university staffs. The Department retains a problems file for students or staff to work through in order to make an appropriate match. So far, this process has worked fairly well, but we are not terribly impressed with the willingness of local university commitment to assist in the study of real problems.

Publications

We have a theory that the R and D process looks something like an hourglass. The top portion represents the planning, development, research and evaluation that goes into an educational program. The bottom portion represents the extensive utilization of the R and D effort. The middle of the hourglass is the bottleneck. One may see this as the diffusion process. For the most part, we diffuse our programs and products through written publications. We represent it as a bottleneck because of the strong belief that the written word is usually poorly written to begin with, and secondly, because it is probably not the most effective medium with which to reach

overworked educators. We are slowly but surely learning to use other kinds of media, probably the best of which is called "eyeball to eyeball." Nevertheless, we publish quantities of materials, each targeted to different audiences.

R and D Briefings is a pamphlet which is published once a month, and is sent to all members of the professional staff. The articles represent summaries of R and D findings and current topics of interest.

Information Highlights is a one-page publication which focuses on a single topic per issue, and highlights the results of some investigation. For example, one issue was devoted to our measurement of staff morale in the school system and showed the trend over the past several years. It is targeted to the professional staff.

Each Child usually focuses on project descriptions and evaluation in some depth. It is carefully written in language that can easily be understood by most persons.

Journal of Research and Development pulls out all the stops and reports studies comprehensively and in technical language. It is targeted to other research personnel and is distributed to Large City Research Directors and many university libraries and foundations. We may phase-out this Journal soon.

The most common publications are called branch reports and these are directed to different personnel, depending upon the report. It is from these reports that the briefer reports are generated.

The ability to write in a clear and concise manner is probably the greatest overall weakness. Look at this manuscript!